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HOUSE BUILDING IN THE HADHRAMAUT

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DURING a recent tour in the Hadhramaut my wife and I collected some notes on the building of houses. Each town in the country has its own individual characteristics. Although the houses of coastal towns are all of the familiar Arab type, built of stone rubble and whitewashed, there is a wide difference in the aspect of the towns themselves. Makalla, for example, is a miniature edition of Zanzibar—tall houses and narrow streets, sometimes not 6 feet across, while Shihr is a town of lower houses, wide streets, and open spaces.

In the Wadi Do'an the tall mud-built houses climb up the banks of the wadi. They are close packed, but it is in their interiors that they merit attention. The colour scheme is black and white and rusty red. Although there is practically no whitewash on the outside of Do'an houses the interiors of the better-class dwellings are spotlessly white. The ceilings of the rooms, which are lofty, are supported by carved pillars of *'elb* [1] wood, and all interior woodwork is of this material. The doors are set in wide heavily carved frames and the whole ornamented extensively with iron nails, 2 inches across the heads, burnished with lead, which shine like polished dollars. It is a modern development of Do'an houses that every room in the house should be provided with its own ablution room, and as a consequence they are really self-contained flats. The entrance door gives on to a passage into the flat, and there is usually not a door into the main living room but a Moorish arch either in the whitewashed wall or of stained *'elb* wood again studded with burnished nails. The ceiling is held up on rafters of *'elb* wood supported by the pillars previously referred to, the mud floor of the next storey above being laid over slats of date wood very attractively arranged in herring-bone pattern.

In Terim the principal feature is the large number of enormous dwelling-houses in a style copied from Malaya but built of mud bricks. The exterior of these houses is decorated with blue, green, yellow, and pink, which is not at all unattractive. Interiors are fitted with every up-to-date contrivance, electric light and fans, telephones, ice plants, and modern European conveniences in the bathrooms. Whereas in Do'an and Shibam there is scarcely a chair to be found these houses are replete with European furniture, albeit some of a rather florid style. Living in such houses as these one is struck at every moment with the reflection that there is hardly a thing in the house that has not had to be transported on camel back over the mountains for six days, and while I mention this it is worth recording that there are sixty cars in Terim itself, each of which has been transported in parts by twelve camels from the coast.

The principal structural detail that the wealthy Seyyids of Terim and Seyyun have to contend with in their building operations is the difficulty of getting long enough timber. The *'elb* or *sidr* tree trows to no great height, and although we found *'arista* trees growing to 50 feet or more in height some days' journey down the Wadi Maseilah, they cannot be transported by

[1] The commonest Arabic name is *sidr*, *Rhamnus nubeca*.

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them from retaliation on the Sei'ar, the traditional enemies of most of the Hadhramaut.

The men of the Manahil, Mahra, and those distant sections of the Kathiri who live up amongst the Mahra on the confines of the desert, take their mothers' names and not their fathers. Ordinarily of course Arabs call themselves Hassan bin Muhammad for example, but these people say Hassan bin Maryam. The Manahil and the Hamumi and some of the other tribes are almost exclusively monogamous and the women, who in some parts are not veiled, are extraordinarily free. A man proposes marriage to the woman direct, and her father will say it is not his concern. Bride price is very high, but the bride brings a lot of stock with her.

I have not journeyed far down the Wadi Maseila on the ground during the last tour, though I had been invited to attend the pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prophet Hud. However as I had not the time to go Seiyid Bubekr took me on the first aerial pilgrimage, as he called it, and the beautiful tomb in its picturesque surroundings crowded with a record pilgrimage presented a great contrast to the last time my wife and I had seen it, out of season when we were travelling down the wadi to Seihut. I noticed on this occasion the ruins of an ancient town on the very edge of the *jol* above 'Einat, and I think these are about the only ruins there are in such a situation in the Hadhramaut.

There is perhaps no need to say more of the big towns of the wadi, Tarim, Seiyun, and Shibam, or of the fertile lands between them now happily all at peace. The famous trench system of Al Ghurfa is now disused and the town is open to traffic, so that cars no longer have to skirt perilously round its walls. The whole place has been green with crops, a record millet crop last year and a record barley crop which was being harvested when I left in April.

Seiyun has changed in some ways, for like Tarim it has a new landing-ground used not only by the Royal Air Force but by civil machines, and in the town itself I have an office—for I am also Resident Adviser to the Kathiri Sultan—and there is a newly uniformed body called the Kathiri Armed Constabulary recruited mainly from the Sultan's slaves. I think it is generally known now that these so-called slaves are in fact much more independent than many free men, but it may not be so well known that with the full agreement and co-operation of the Sultans steps have been taken to grant freedom to any slave who desires it. The camel park has been moved from beneath the palace and there preparations are being made to lay out a small garden surrounded by the arcade in which are the police station, the post office, and a small dispensary.

Seiyid Bubekr's house which was being built when we first visited Seiyun three years ago is now finished. Its architecture is, I think I may say, not approved of by Miss Stark, as she no doubt will tell you, but it is a remarkably comfortable house, and when the family is living there a very happy house to stay in; but for some months Seiyid Bubekr's family has preferred to live in another big house of the old-fashioned kind in the town. Living in the empty Dar es Salaam, as it is called, gave me so much the feeling that my wife and I once had when we spent a day or two as the only guests in an enormous hotel in Belgium out of season that I prefer to live in the other house with Seiyid Bubekr. Many are the people who have enjoyed his kindly